

## rose gold crown, you broke down by ilmostro

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Aged-Up Character(s), Alternate Universe - Royalty, Childhood Friends, Equestrian, M/M, Pining, also the rating is for Later, boys finding safety in each other, mike is a prince, more characters will be added as they enter the story, will is the royal family's lead stablehand

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Duck the Percheron, Holly Wheeler, Karen Wheeler, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Thomas the Thoroughbred, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

Michael is a prince with no interest in being king, but the impending responsibility looms over him like a great shadow. He finds his escape in the stables, with a horse named Duck and a stablehand named Will.

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The small kingdom of Hawkins was ruled by a benevolent and well-loved queen. She freed her subjects of her late husband's tyrannical rule, abolishing his harsh taxation laws on the poor and bringing peace and stability to their kingdom once again. The royal family consisted of just four now; Queen Karen, her eldest daughter Nancy, her son Michael, and her youngest daughter Holly. Each of the queen's children was as kind as the last, each doing their part to address the kingdom's needs in any way they could. Even little Holly could be seen holding her sister's hand as they handed out extra food and other necessities to the poorer population down in the square. The royal family never hid in their castle; they were in the kingdom nearly every day, doing one task or another.

The queen's only son, Michael, heir to the throne, was no exception to this. While he found himself partial to assisting farmers, he never refused to lend a hand to anyone who asked. At 22 years old, Prince Michael was a tall, handsome, and kind young man growing into himself more and more each day.

The only problem was that he had no interest in assuming the throne.

His experience of kings were that they were all bigheaded, callous, and remarkably unlikeable. He had no intention of becoming the man his father had been. The throne changed the hearts and minds of men far more equipped for it than he.

Prince Michael cherished his role in the kingdom. He coveted his time on the ground, getting his hands dirty and putting his body to work in a meaningful, beneficial way. Not for him, but for the kingdom. It gave him purpose, and the reward of a strong clap on the back and a subject's gratitude was the best gift he could ever ask for. If he became king, his time with the rest of the kingdom would diminish. His life would become boring assemblies and strategy meetings and *document signing*.

And, most importantly, if he were to accept the crown... his time in the stables would most likely come to an end.

There was nothing on this earth or the next that he wouldn't do to stop that from happening. The stables were a safe place, *his* safe place, where he could be himself. Free from responsibility, free from studies, free from everything except the sound of his own heartbeat rushing in his ears and the steady gallop of strong hooves on the grass.

And then there was Will.

Prince Michael's best friend of over 16 years, the only person who understood Michael's love for his horse, for the freedom of riding in general. Should he become king, he would be forced to spend less time with Will. Even now, he couldn't think of excuses as to why the king would visit the stables as often as he imagined himself doing.

The prince entered the royal stables with the steady determination that he was getting on his horse today one way or another. The stables were enormous, with white and grey bricked walls rounding up into a domed ceiling. The stalls were lined along both walls and were crafted of a gorgeously dark mahogany wood, with black railings and details. There were spaces in front of the stall doors for the horses to poke their heads out of, and hooks next to each stall where each horse's halter and lead rope hung. At the end of the long center isle were two doors; one led to the feed room and the other to the tack room, which contained all of the riding equipment. Attached to the stable was a smaller building, and that was where the hay was stored.

It was just after midday, which meant the horses were out in the pasture. As he walked down the isle to the open doors that lead out into the pasture, he wondered where his friend was. The stalls were clean, fresh shavings and hay laid down, but the water buckets were empty and there was one sitting in front of each currently-occupied stall. Perhaps Will was on his break.

Regardless, Michael head out to the pasture after grabbing his horse's halter and lead from their hook. There were only five horses currently living in their stables; one for each of the royal family. The late king's horse, a flashy palomino thoroughbred that stood at a proud 17 hands, was as beautiful as he was intelligent. His father never appreciated the animal as much as he should have; preferring

cruel 'training' methods over a more gentle, humane approach.

Michael was more than happy to hear that after his father had passed, he was free to do what he wished with the horse. He hardly spared it a thought. He knew exactly who he was gifting the horse to as soon as he had been able.

He approached the fence, already having spotted his favorite companion. He was admittedly hard to miss, towering over the other horses at close to 18.3 hands. His horse was considerably less flashy than the thoroughbred, but he quite liked that.

"Come on, Duck!" He called out towards his horse, whose ears immediately perked up. The enormous black percheron lifted its broad head, immediately abandoning the tall grass he was snacking on to happily trot over. That was what motivated him to buy Duck from a farmer he had helped out, back when he was 15. The older man who owned the draft nearly had a heart attack at the prince's offer for him, and tried to refuse, but Michael insisted on paying him for the horse, and paying him handsomely, at that.

Duck's heart and personality matched his size, and Michael knew he had to bring him home the minute they met.

Now, as he pet Duck's muzzle and snuck him a treat he secretly swiped, he was reminded of how good of a decision it was. He couldn't imagine his life without his best friend, not anymore. They were a perfect team. Most days, it felt like Duck knew him better than anyone. He snorted as he slid the halter over Duck's head and secured it, clipping the lead rope into the ring underneath his horse's jaw. That was probably true.

He led Duck out of the pasture through one of the only gates in the white fence that contained all of the royal horses. The prince could see his late father's thoroughbred a ways off, grazing. He led his own horse back into the stable to groom him.

Michael walked Duck into the grooming station, unclipping his lead and cross-tying him with the ropes on either wall. With his horse secured, he went over to the shelves in the back of the room that stretched from wall to wall. Each of the horses had their own

individualized brushes, hoof picks, combs, and other miscellaneous items. He knew it was typically one of the groomers' duty to do this, but he always found it relaxing, and it good bonding time between him and Duck. He never minded the work, and honestly, he was leagues taller than everyone who worked in the barn, so it was much easier for him to do it.

He himself would need a stool to reach Duck's forelocks, if his horse wasn't so compliant and didn't lower his head when the prince asked him to.

Luckily, Michael never had to resort to it. He couldn't say the same for how Duck behaved with the other stablehands, save for Will. Duck had a tendency to be stubborn and plant himself like a tree if someone he didn't like very much was handling him. It was part of the reason why Michael insisted on doing most of the work for him, if Will wasn't around. That itself was a rarity, but he does manage to sneak in during Will's break hours to get to Duck before his friend.

As he went about working the dirt and grime out of Duck's coat with the blue curry comb from his horse's grooming tote, he found his mind wandering.

He was meant to be in the castle's library right now, awaiting one of the members of the royal council's court. They were meant to be teaching him the laws of the kingdom, and the process of proposing and carrying them through. Horribly, dreadfully boring garbage. He had no interest in learning how to create new methods to enslave their subjects. The queen has tried her best to undo the wrong the king had done, and for the most part, succeeded, but she had no say in new laws. The only power she had in that area was that she could repeal or amend current laws, which turned out to be extremely convenient, but no progress could be made until new, better, permanent laws were put in place.

And that's why his mother was pushing so hard for him to accept the throne.

He wasn't a selfish person. He knew the good it would do the kingdom if he stepped up, but in all honesty... he couldn't see himself as king. He had all of the love and compassion in the world for their

people, but he had none of the skills. Michael didn't believe the suited the throne in any way, shape, or form. Their kingdom would be better off left in the hands of someone more capable.

He had his eyes on the horizon. He always has. He had no interest in being locked up in the castle, unable to see his best friends, buried under mountains of bureaucracy and responsibility. He wanted to be free. He wanted his time with their subjects, his time with Duck, his time with Will.

He shook his head. It was useless to pretend he had a say in what was to happen to him. He knew no matter how he rationalized it, he was acting selfishly. His future was never his to decide. He carried his disappointment with him all the way through grooming. After he finished, he replaced the tote and went to grab his saddle, saddle pad, girth, and bridle from the tack room. He placed the items down onto the table near the shelves, keeping his saddle pad in his arms. He walked over to his horse's left side and carefully threw it over Duck's back, positioning it correctly before walking over and grabbing his saddle. He lifted it over his horse's back and set it down gently, shifting it minutely until it seemed right. Then he grabbed the girth from the table, buckling it on the loosest hole.

He sighed, the weight of his earlier thoughts dampening his mood slightly.

"I don't even know the first thing about being king."

The prince rested his head on his horse's neck, his quiet admission lost in Duck's long, black mane. The percheron nickered softly, bobbing his head. Michael smiled, patting the horse's chest.

"You always know just what to say, Duck."

"Need some help?"

The prince startled, turning around with tensed shoulders, but immediately dropping them as soon as he saw who it was. "Don't scare me like that, Will."

The stablehand smiled indulgently at him. "I've been making quite a

bit of noise, Prince Michael. I can't imagine how you didn't hear me."

"Ah, my mistake then," The prince apologized, scratching the back of his neck in his trademark nervous fashion. "I must have been lost in my own head."

"No harm done, your highness," Will replied, coming closer and taking over the prince's task. Will was slight of frame and short in stature, but he never complained about it. His size caused him to be underestimated a majority of the time, even mocked, whenever his status as head of the stable was brought up. *How could someone so small handle a responsibility so large*, they always laughed. Will never minded; he preferred to prove them wrong. He took the most hot-headed and difficult horse and worked with them day and night, until they rose to the full potential Will saw in them. Horses came in as problems and left as solutions, and even the most arrogant client would eat their words. They would leave, tail between their legs and pockets lighter.

The queen was more than happy to allow Will to run his own business outside of their stable. She loved him as her own, and knew his talents shouldn't be wasted simply caring for five very well-behaved horses. It did help quite a bit that the client horses would be housed in the *royal stables*. The high-class people would pay a handsome sum for that level of care. And typically they paid even more, after seeing the miracles Will performed. Will also accepted clients from lower classes, believing no one should be left struggling with an unmanageable horse simply because they couldn't afford to train it. He would come up with different forms of payment for those clients; whatever they felt they could offer, or nothing at all. Will's family had struggled tremendously before they were invited to the kingdom to care for the stables. He knew what it was like to have next to nothing, and he refused to charge anyone who couldn't afford it. He loved his job, he loved the challenges it brought, and at the end of the day, it was more than enough for him. He was quite famous among the five regions, and Michael couldn't be more proud of his best friend.

"Please don't call me that, Will. Not here. I'm just Mike here, okay?" Prince Michael insisted gently, in that way of his. Will nodded, walking around Duck to thread the girth straps through the buckles

on his right side.

"Sorry, Mike. I keep forgetting."

The prince smiled to himself, pleased. No one ever called him his nickname except for Will and his sister Nancy, even though his best (and only, to be honest) friend still needed a nudge every so often. It never bothered Michael much, though. Will was respectful to every soul who passed through the stable doors, and he knew better than to address anyone informally without explicit permission every time. Even his own best friend, who just so happened to be the prince.

Will stepped back from Duck, smiling softly as the horse nudged his hand for either treats or pats. Knowing Duck, it was probably both. The prince watched fondly as his two best friends playfully interacted. He moved with Will so easily, like they were in tune on a level only the prince accompanied them on. The visible ease of their friendship always spread a comfortable warmth through Michael's chest, but he was used to it by now. He had been so relieved when he brought Duck home and they instantly connected with each other. He hadn't known how important it was for his two best friends to get along before it happened, and he breathed a huge, secret sigh of relief when they did.

"Would you accompany me?" Prince Michael requested, taking Duck's reigns from Will's outstretched hand. The stablehand did a quick once-over around the stable, noting the empty buckets still lined in front of the stalls, and the other work that still needed to be done.

"I'm not certain I should, your hi-... Mike. I have yet to finish my chores for the afternoon," Will replied regretfully, but his fingers twitched by his sides. The prince could recognize that tick anywhere, and he used his knowledge of it to his advantage. It was the same tick his friend has had for as long as he's known him. Will was itching to ride.

"Please? I hate to ride alone, and you know how I enjoy our time together. We'll be back in time to finish chores, and I'll even help you with them," Michael pouted, hands raised and clasped together in a pleading manner.



Will shook his head vehemently, but he went over to the tack room and returned with his riding equipment. "Last time I checked, you were a prince, not a stablehand, Mike."

"Better a stablehand than a bigheaded would-be king any day," Mike snorted. Will sighed at him and dropped his things on the table, just as the prince had.

Will then unclipped Duck from the cross ties, allowing Michael to lead him out of the grooming station and into the isle. He then walked out of the room, grabbed a halter and lead off of the hook on his horse's stall next to Duck's, and carried them out of the stable.

Both the prince and his horse waited eagerly for his return.

They heard them before they even saw their shadows. Duck's ears perked forward at the sound of hooves on the cobblestone path that led into the stable.

Will came into view first, his stride confident in a way that it only ever was when he was in command of a horse. Michael's gift to Will followed closely behind. The thoroughbred's white mane gleamed beautifully in the early afternoon sun, a striking image against its pale gold coat. Its strong legs held a steady, easy pace behind Will. That was one of the more noticeable difference between its behavior with his father and his friend. The horse never looked at ease under his father's tight, unyielding fist the way he did under Will's calm, confident hold.

His and Will's horses acknowledged each other pleasantly. They got along famously, much to their relief. It was difficult enough to find time to ride together; adding two horses that disliked each other would have complicated everything that much more.

Will groomed and tacked his horse up in record time. He looked at Michael expectantly, and the prince took the hint and led Duck out of the stable and to the mounting block.

He mounted his horse easily and coaxed him off the side, waiting for Will. Shortly after, Will emerged with his horse and mounted him smoothly from the ground, using his light weight and impressive

agility to spring up and swing over without so much as ruffling a hair on his horse's mane.

The prince swallowed thickly and turned his attention to his own horse, pointedly refusing to acknowledge the way his ears burned.

Will made a clicking sound from out of the side of his mouth and the horse began to move forward.

"Atta boy, Thomas," he praised. Michael copied him to keep pace, and off they went. They rode through a well-used trail in the woods along the pasture to the open field they liked to ride in the most. Michael loved the lush green grass and the never-ending horizon. He felt weightless there, like he was a normal boy with a normal life, with no looming royal duties or future.

Here, in the quiet, open field, with his best friends in all the world, he was just Mike.

He looked over at Will, and found the other boy staring at him with an open, peaceful expression. Michael had no idea, but Will was memorizing the way the gentle afternoon breeze tussled his wild curls, the glow of the sun on his skin. He was tracing the attractive splash of freckles across the bridge of his nose, and the curve of his back as he sat so comfortably upon his horse, like there was nowhere else on earth he would rather be. Will knew it to be true. The prince was at home here, his expression one of pure contentment and joy. It was truly one of the only times it ever was.

And Will was the one who was there to see it. He was always the one who was there to see it.

He allowed himself, in that moment, and in so many other moments just like it, to pretend that the prince's current happiness had anything to do with him.

Michael grinned excitedly at him— a rare and unfairly beautiful sight. Will returned it, causing the prince's heart to stutter in his chest. It wasn't anything new, that little skip, the butterflies in his stomach, but each time was just as confusing as the last. However, Michael didn't have time to waste to dwell on his ridiculous heart. Someone

would come looking for him soon, to drag him back to his own personal brand of Hell; sitting behind a desk, surrounded by his future life.

"Ready?" Will asked him.

The prince tightened his grip on the reigns, his eyes ablaze with wildfire and his body thrumming with the desperate need to be weightless and free.

"Ready."

**Author's Note:**

okay dudes, the first chapter is out! let me know what you thought, please leave a comment below OR you can find me at tozbraks on tumblr!! either way, thanks for checking it out :)